

Key Policy Letters Signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary July 2004

July 2004

Dear Superintendent:

As I am sure you know, the arts are a core academic subject under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). I believe the arts have a significant role in education both for their intrinsic value and for the ways in which they can enhance general academic achievement and improve students' social and emotional development.

As I travel the country, I often hear that arts education programs are endangered because of *No Child Left Behind*. This message was echoed in a recent series of teacher roundtables sponsored by the Department of Education. It is both disturbing and just plain wrong.

It's disturbing not just because arts programs are being diminished or eliminated, but because NCLB is being interpreted so narrowly as to be considered the reason for these actions. The truth is that NCLB included the arts as a core academic subject because of their importance to a child's education. *No Child Left Behind* expects teachers of the arts to be highly qualified, just as it does teachers of English, math, science, and history.

The Value of the Arts

The arts, perhaps more than any other subject, help students to understand themselves and others, whether they lived in the past or are living in the present. President Bush recognizes this important contribution of the arts to every child's education. He has said, "From music and dance to painting and sculpting, the arts allow us to explore new worlds and to view life from another perspective." In addition, they "encourage individuals to sharpen their skills and abilities and to nurture their imagination and intellect."

A comprehensive arts education may encompass such areas as the history of the arts, the honing of critical analysis skills, the re-creation of classic as well as contemporary works of art, and the expression of

students' ideas and feelings through the creation of their own works of art. In other words, students should have the opportunity to respond to, perform, and create in the arts.

Setting the Record Straight

There is much flexibility for states and local school districts under the *No Child Left Behind Act* with respect to support for the core subjects. In Arizona, for example, as part of Superintendent Tom Horne's current "content-rich curriculum" initiative, \$4 million in Comprehensive School Reform (Title I, Part F) funds are supporting arts education at 43 current Comprehensive School Reform schools throughout the state. Additional Arizona Arts Education Initiative school sites are being supported with Title V (Innovative Programs) funding under NCLB.

Under NCLB, Title I, Part A funds also can be used by local education agencies to improve the educational achievement of disadvantaged students through the arts. In the same way, Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants can address the professional development needs of teachers of the arts, and portions of Title II funds can support partnerships that include nonprofit, cultural-arts organizations.

The arts also can be an important part of learning and enrichment in programs supported by 21st Century Community Learning Centers program funds. Before- and after-school, weekend, and summer programs are excellent opportunities to stimulate students' artistic interests and foster their growth or to integrate arts learning with other subjects, including reading and math. Cultural partners in the community -- arts centers, symphonies, theatres, and the like -- can offer engaging venues as well as skilled instructors and mentors for students.

Various information about some of the publications available on arts education is enclosed. We are providing this information for your convenience, and you may want to share these resources with your state department or central office staff as well as with your administrators, principals, and teachers.

The Value-Added Benefits of the Arts

In keeping with NCLB's principle of classroom practices based on research evidence, studies have shown that arts teaching and learning can increase students' cognitive and social development. The arts can be a critical link for students in developing the crucial thinking skills and motivations they need to achieve at higher levels. *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, a research compendium of the Arts Education Partnership, offers evidence of such links, including connections between arts learning and achievement in reading and math.

Based on a review of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88), University of California-Los Angeles researchers determined that students who were highly involved in arts instruction earned better grades and performed better on standardized tests. They also performed more community service, watched fewer hours of television, reported less boredom in school, and were less likely to drop out of school. These findings were also true for students from the lowest socioeconomic status quartile of the 25,000 students surveyed, belying the assumption that socioeconomic status, rather than arts engagement, contributes to such gains in academic achievement and social involvement. As mentioned in the enclosure, a summary of these and other findings in *Critical Links* can be accessed at the Arts Education Partnership's Web site at: www.aep-arts.org/CLtoolkitpage.htm.*

For both the important knowledge and skills they impart and the ways in which they help students to succeed in school and in life, the arts are an important part of a complete education. As we work together to implement NCLB, let's ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn and to grow in and through the arts.

Sincerely,

/s/

Rod Paige

Enclosure

Resources for Arts Education

U.S. Department of Education

Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII): The Education Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement, much like an entrepreneurial foundation, makes strategic investments in innovative educational practices through two dozen discretionary grant programs, including several arts-in-education programs. Among these is the Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination program, which supports the development, documentation, evaluation, and dissemination of innovative, cohesive models that demonstrate effectiveness in:

- Integrating and strengthening arts into the core elementary and middle school curricula;
- Strengthening arts instruction in those grades; and
- Improving students' academic performance, including their skills in creating, performing, and responding to the arts.

For more information on the Arts in Education programs in OII, visit: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/index.html.

Opening Minds Through the Arts, an arts integration project in Tucson, Arizona, supported by OII's Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination program, is featured in the January 26, 2004, issue of *The Education Innovator*, OII's e-mail newsletter at: www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/innovator/index.html. This project influenced the Arizona Department of Education's decision to support arts-in-education programs within the state's Comprehensive School Reform network, using Title I, Part F funds. The July 12 issue of *The Education Innovator* is to feature another of the Arts in Education Model program sites, in Hamilton, Ohio. To receive weekly *Education Innovator* issues, click on "Subscribe" in the masthead of the newsletter page above.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been

conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and the arts. Information from the 1997 *Nation's Report Card in the Arts* can be found at: www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/arts.

Arts Education Partnership (AEP)

The Arts Education Partnership is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic, and government organizations that demonstrates and promotes the essential role of the arts in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools. The Partnership includes over 140 organizations that are national in scope and impact. It also includes state and local partnerships focused on influencing education policies and practices to promote quality arts education. Specific resources available from AEP include the following:

Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development is a research compendium that reviews 62 studies of arts learning in dance, drama, music, multiple arts, and visual arts. Interpretive essays examine the implications of the body of studies in each of these areas, and an overview essay explores the issue of the transfer of learning in the arts to other academic and social skills. A *Critical Links* Tool Kit is available at: www.aep-arts.org/CLtoolkitpage.htm.

No Subject Left Behind: A Guide to Arts Education Opportunities in the 2001 NCLB Act is a guide for state and local arts and education leaders to learn more about the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* and the multiple opportunities for arts education. It provides a brief overview of the legislation, including where to find specific references to the arts, descriptions of individual programs with arts-specific examples that have received funding, and links to Web sites for additional information. *No Subject Left Behind* is available at: <http://aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/NoSubjectLeftBehind.pdf>.

Education Commission of the States (ECS)

ECS is an interstate compact created in 1965 to improve public education by facilitating the exchange of information, ideas, and

experiences among state policymakers and education leaders. Recognizing the contributions the arts make to student achievement and economic development will be the focus of Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee's tenure as the 2004-06 ECS chairman. The goal of his ECS Chairman's Initiative will be to "ensure that every child has the opportunity to participate in, learn about, and enjoy the arts." More information on the initiative will appear on the ECS Web site at: www.ecs.org.*

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

In 2003, a NASBE Study Group on the Lost Curriculum examined the status of curriculum in the nation's schools, particularly with regard to the arts and foreign languages. The Study Group concluded that a substantial body of research highlights the benefits of including the arts in the curriculum. Second, it concluded that the arts are "increasingly at risk of being lost as part of the core curriculum."

The group's report, *The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring a place for the arts and foreign languages in America's schools*, contains 10 recommendations for incorporating all core subject areas, including the arts, into the improvement strategies promoted by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. A recent issue of NASBE's *The State Education Standard* was devoted to the arts and contains a summary of the Study Group's report and its recommendations, along with informative articles on arts education. You may access articles from the journal issue and a summary of *The Complete Curriculum* report at: www.nasbe.org/standard/index.html.* Ordering information for the full report may be found on the NASBE Web site.

- This document contains contact addresses and Web sites for information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or addresses, or Web sites for particular items does not reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.

